

REVISED SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents to the Policy and Resources Committee a revised copy of the council's social media policy. The policy has been updated to reflect feedback and developments in relation to the use of social media and in particular the impact that it can have on employees.

The policy has been consulted on with departments and employee representatives from the Joint trades Unions.

Revision of the social media policy was also an identified action in the council's Audit Scotland Action Plan for completion in December 2014.

It is important to note that social media is an area of ongoing change and development, with case law regularly bringing new issues into consideration. For this reason, the policy may be further reviewed and updated in 2015.

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee agree the revised policy.

Revised Social Media Policy

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Social Media Policy has been revised to ensure it supports the council's increasing use of social media, as both a communication and customer service channel.
- 2.2 The draft revised policy was developed following a working group meeting between representatives of the council's IHR (Communications and HR) and Governance and Risk teams and Trade Unions, and has been considered by Customer Services DMT.
- 2.3 The key difference between this and the previous version is the addition of section 8, outlining council support for employees should they feature negatively in social media commentary in the context of their council role.
- 2.4 The social media policy is identified as an action in the Audit Scotland Action Plan with a target date of completion by December 2014.
- 2.5 It is important to note that social media is an area of ongoing change and development, with case law regularly bringing new issues into consideration. For this reason, the policy may be further reviewed and updated in 2015.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee agree the revised Social Media Policy as appended to this report.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 'Social media' is the term commonly given to on-line sites which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement. This includes blogs, message boards, social networking websites, content sharing websites and many other similar online channels.
- 4.2 Argyll and Bute Council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way in which we do business. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we

communicate, reach out to and interact with the different communities we serve.

- 4.3 The growing use of social media is highlighting both positive and negative consequences that information published can have for those individuals publishing it and their employer.
- 4.4 In order that the council's policy position reflects the current usage of social media and addresses issues that have emerged since the original policy was approved, the revised policy was prepared through a process of consultation and engagement by the Communications Team with a working group of senior officers and employee representatives from the Joint Trades Unions.
- 4.5 The key difference between this and the previous version is the addition of section 8, outlining council support for employees should they feature negatively in social media commentary in the context of their council role. Section 9 relating to elected members has also been updated to reflect the support that will be provided to councillors in relation to social media.
- 4.6 Council employees have had negative experiences after featuring in social media as a result of campaigns and policy decisions. This can have an extremely detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing. The council, in terms of its duty of care, must offer as much support as possible to employees who experience this as a result of their work. However, there are legal limitations to our ability to take action.
- 4.7 Setting out a clear policy position on this is essential to giving employees the knowledge and support that they need if this situation arises. The revised policy says that should an employee be mentioned negatively in social media in the context of their employment, "the council's response will be assessed on a case by case basis". As reflected in discussions in the working group, this could mean for example providing support in building the employee's resilience (through the council's counselling service), communications advice on third party responses, or advice on options open to the employee to pursue.
- 4.8 Elected members will use social media in different ways to employees in relation to their role with the council including engaging with their constituents or taking part in online discussions. As elected representatives they are not employees of the council. At times social media commentary can be negative and it is important that elected members have information, training and guidance on how to act in response to this type of situation. The revised policy recognises this and commits the council to providing information, training and guidance to councillors regarding social media. Specific and targeted training will be provided for elected members on social media, its use, its impact and the current legal position.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Social media is an important tool in the council's communications and engagement with customers, service users, employees and the public. Ensuring that our policy position is robust, relevant and provides appropriate guidance and advice to employees is critical. As social media continues to develop apace, regular review of the policy position is important.
- 5.2 The revised policy as attached addresses current issues and ensure that the council has the tools to maximize the effectiveness of social media for our

reputation management and minimises the potential for negative coverage.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 **Policy** The revised policy is attached for approval.
- 6.2 **Financial** None from this report
- 6.3 **Legal** There are legal limitations on the council's options for responding to negative social media coverage on behalf of employees
- 6.4 **HR** The council has a duty of care to employees and this includes offering appropriate support if the employee is targeted by social media as a result of their employment. Inappropriate use of social media by employees can result in disciplinary action being taken.
- 6.5 **Equalities** The social media policy has been revised in accordance with our equality duties
- 6.6 **Risk** There is a reputational risk to the council if an appropriate and relevant social media policy is not in place.
- 6.7 **Customer Service** Social Media is an important tool in improving customer service.

Executive Director of Customer Services

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Revised Social Media Policy